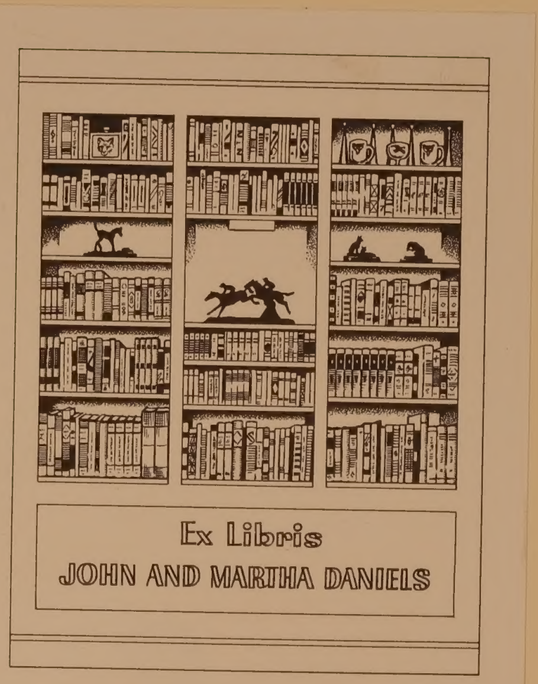
SPORT DRAWINGS

Percy Crosby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TURNED LOOSE
Water Color

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SPORT DRAWINGS

by
Percy Crosby

Percy Crosby, Publisher
McLean, Virginia

In "A CARTOONIST'S PHILOSOPHY" Percy Crosby tells about his first experiments in painting, using the tubes of paint and brushes in a trunk hidden away by his father in the cellar. Thwarted in this color work when his father suddenly came upon myriads of colored worms hanging from the trunk lid, he went to the coal bin for materials, and thus began his work in black and white. It seems far from these early attempts to the work so beautifully reproduced in this book, but it really is the result of countless experiments destroyed, continual endeavor to improve, dogged perseverance and determination to say what he wishes to say in line, form and mass.

Spontaneity, rhythm and movement, as well as form—these are the qualities of Percy Crosby's work. Everything with him has to move, he has no feeling of life standing still—static. When his first exhibition was held at the Anderson Galleries in 1928, artists were amazed and delighted. Here was one of them who gave apparently without effort that quality of life in line which all hope to attain.

In this first exhibition he showed his boats, dancing figures, his horses on the track. In each instance, those who were especially interested in boats, the dance or the track fell in love with what he had done to bring to them a perfect expression of what they knew. The boats scuttered over the waves, hung rolling in a calm, slanted across the paper, and the yachtsman stood before them balancing to the rolling of the Gallery, and talked of wind and wave, storm and calm. Enthusiasts of the dance studied the few swift lines which were the essence of the dancer, and talked of Pavlowa there before them, and in hushed excitement the racing people watched the thudding hoofs and straining necks, the jockeys fighting for the last few feet.

The critics were unanimous in praise. Edwin Alden Jewell in the New York Times spoke of "the faculty here attested for catching life in motion. He gives us sketches of race horses flying at top speed, done in a manner that is simply miraculous." And "Mr. Crosby shows himself to be a calligraphic artist capable of achieving complete expression with the utmost economy of line. Some of his little sketches are mere brief flourishes of the pencil. Yet how they vibrate! How the design lives!" In the New York Evening Post, Margaret Bruening said, "If movement were ever caught and transmuted to line it is here. The marvelous resilience of bodily movement, the slightest evanescence of bodily gesture seems caught in these drawings. In a few fluent graphs he gives you a whole character with a swift swirl of direction."

His first exhibition was over. Percy Crosby, like Wordsworth's Happy Warrior "had wrought upon the plan that pleased his boyish thoughts." He packed up his drawings for storage, to be looked at perhaps at some future time, and began again. In three years of almost incredible energy, work and play, he went everywhere that he could study the human body in action. Football and polo players, boxers and wrestlers, ice skaters and dancers, jockeys and gentleman riders, all were grist to his mill. He went to Europe and back. He wrote two books. He developed his technique in dry point and lithography, he made countless water colors and a few oils, and all this time, every day appeared "Skippy" with his old-young philosophy.

In 1931 he held his second exhibition. In his essay on style Walter Pater says, speaking of writers, "Truth is the essence of such artistic quality as they may have. And further all beauty is in the long run only fineness of truth." Percy Crosby has a fetish for truth. Pater further says "For just in proportion as the writer's aim comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact, but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work fine art in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense." In this second exhibition Percy Crosby showed a series of whirling, swirling, fluid revolving abstractions which he called rhythms. They were utterly different from anything he, or anyone else, had ever shown, but they represented his sense of the city, the world and life. The public and the critics enjoyed them. The New York Times said, "The rhythms resolving themselves into fluid, birdlike forms, inspired by the noise and confusion of New York, are understandable only to those who make similar translations of the subject... Crosby's lithographs of man or animal in violent action are quick as a streak of lightning, a curious sort of lightning that despite speed always has time to be specifically formed—to be a horse or Argentina or a small boy diving or a football game." The New York Evening Post,—"In his work he displays a seriousness and soundness that his more familiar and much admired strips do not lead one to suspect." The New York Tribune,—"An instinctive feeling for drawing is everywhere evident in this exhibition of work by Percy Crosby at the American Art-Anderson Galleries. He seems to seize every opportunity that presents itself to record his impressions of life, showing a remarkable range of observation in the process. He has sketched prize fighters, polo players, horse racing—he has delved into the secrets of human nature and paused to render fancifully some vivid incident in the studio, and always there is energy and directness in his observations."

And in this book, I think perhaps the first with so broad an interpretation of sport ever undertaken by any artist, Percy Crosby really presents to the public his third exhibition of his work. A few of these pictures were in his second exhibition. I remember in particular the water color of a group of young horses in the pasture, pretending to be startled and scampering with tossing heads, manes and tails, along the pasture fence. The reproduction in this book is almost as good as the original. Jonas Lie, one of our foremost painters, standing in front of this water color, smiling in enjoyment of the youngsters and their playfulness, said, "I know of no one else in this or any other country who could do it."

Most of the reproductions in this book are from new drawings and water colors, and present the most complete description of sport in this country which has ever been made, but really in this book is Percy Crosby, who again like Wordsworth's Happy Warrior "not content that former worth stand fast, looks forward, persevering to the last, from well to better, daily self surpast."

WALTER M. GRANT

TRIUMPH
Drawing

DOWN THE FIELD
Lithograph

SLIPPING
Dry Point

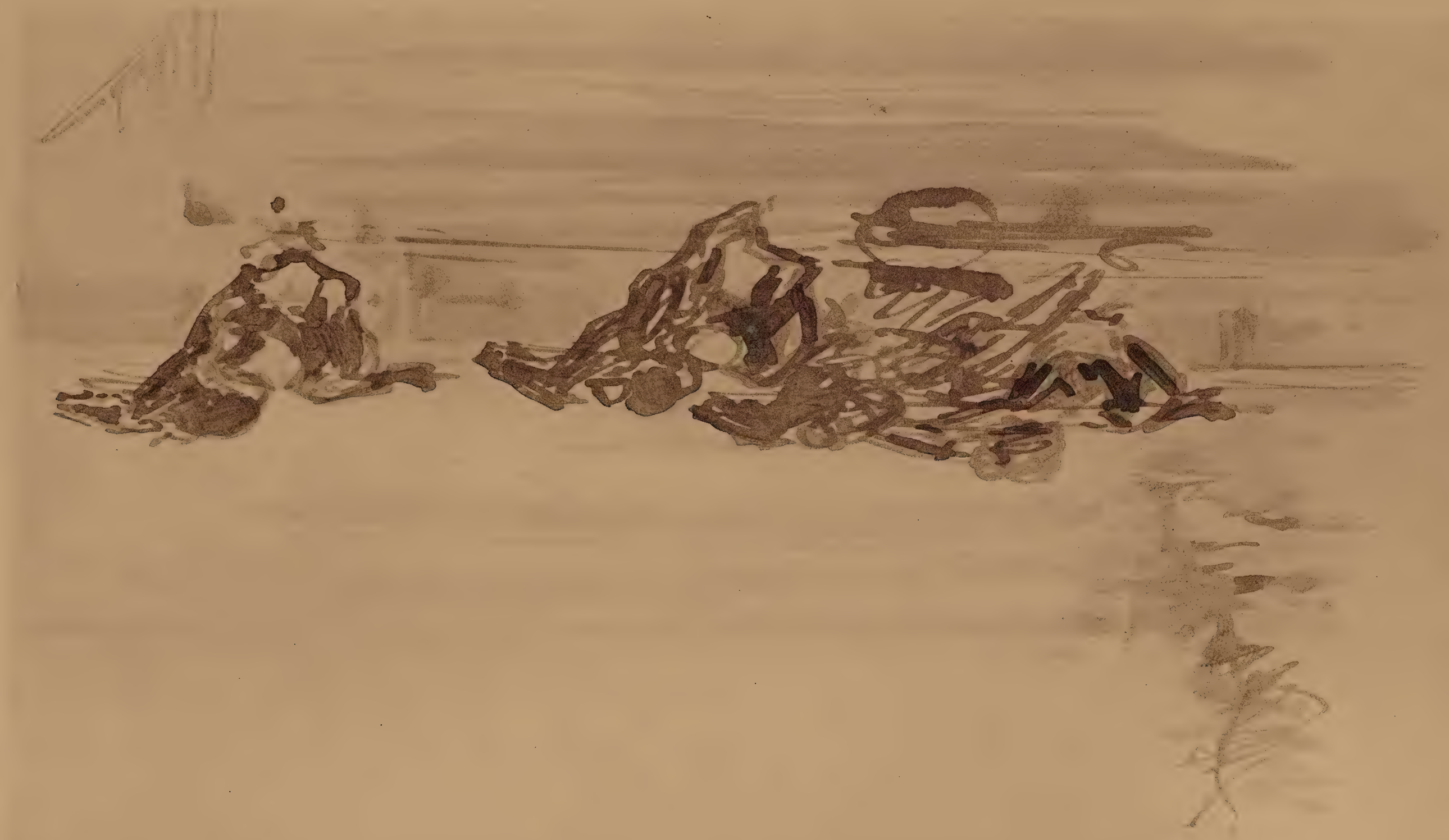
SLIPPING
Dry Point

THE PLANT
LIBRARY

DOWN THE TRACK

Drawing

From the collection of
Mrs. Payne Whitney



FANCY SKATING
Lithograph

BRONCO BUSTER
Water Color

THE SOMERSAULT
Lithograph

THE HAMMER THROWER
Lithograph

AT THE GARDEN

Lithograph

FIGURE SKATER
Dry Point

INTERCEPTING A PASS

Lithograph

AT MEADOWBROOK

Drawing

THE KICK
Lithograph

EAST RIVER PLUNGE
Lithograph

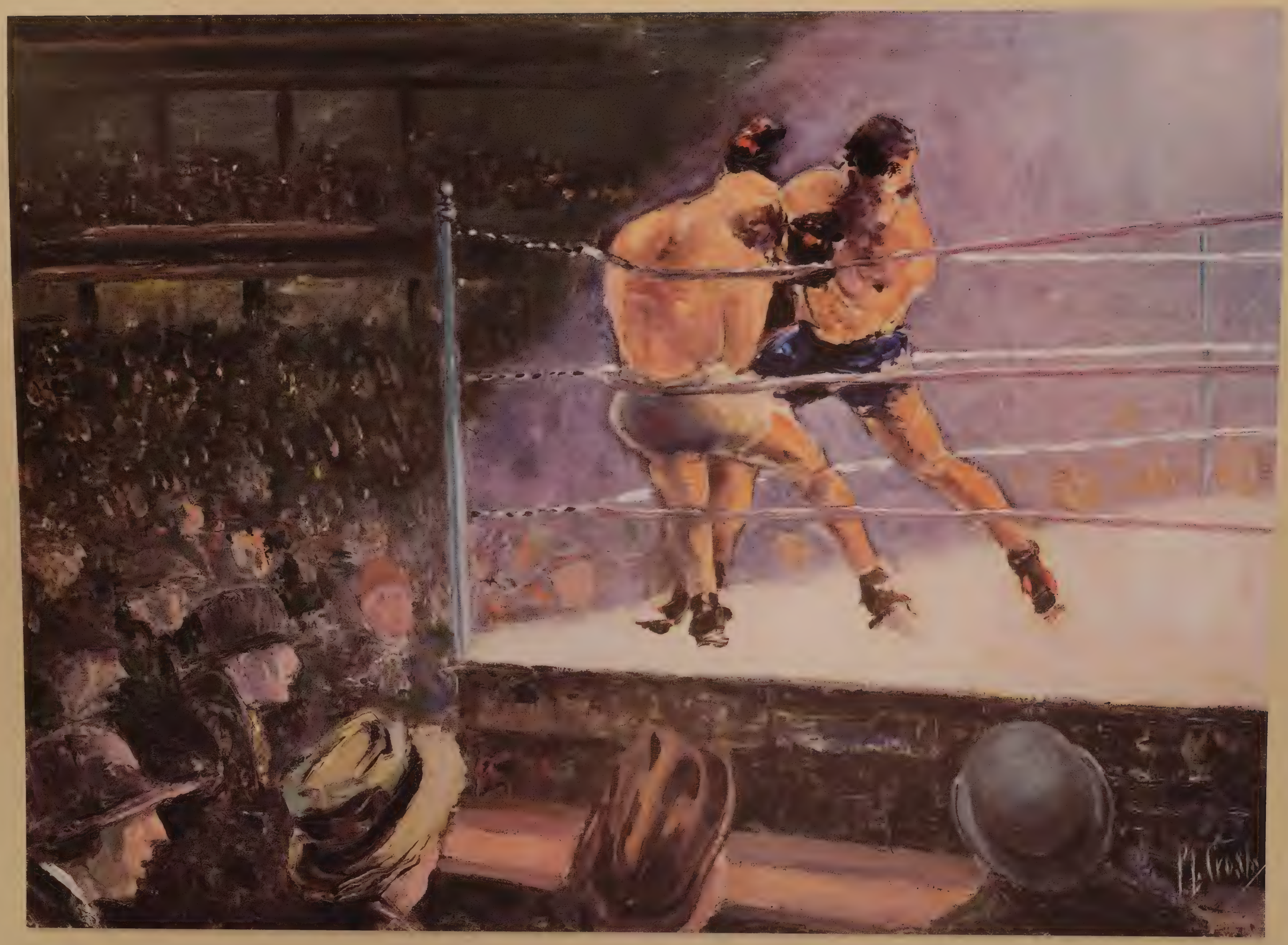
HOLDING
Drawing

A SHOT AT GOAL

Drawing

OVERHEAD SMASH
Lithograph

JUST BEFORE THE BELL
Oil



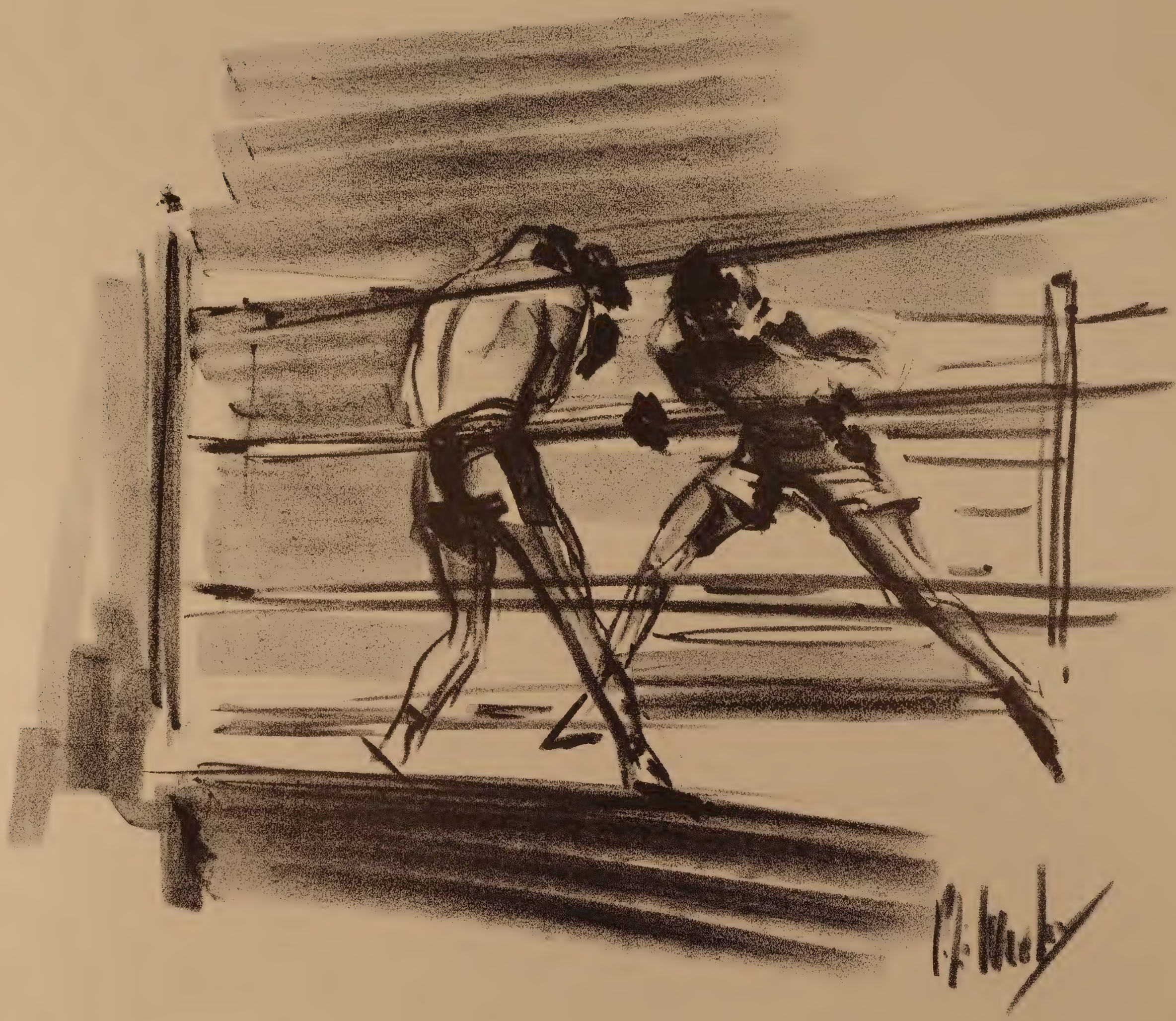
DOWN TO THE SEA

Drawing

CLEAR FIELD AHEAD
Lithograph

FRENCH OFFICER
Drawing

GROGGY
Lithograph



JACK KNIFE
Drawing—Awarded Second
Prize, Silver Medal, 10th
Olympiad, Los Angeles
1932

THE PLUNGE
Lithograph

THE CABBY
Lithograph

DUCK FLIGHT OVER TAMPA BAY
Oil

THE BEGINNER
Lithograph

A HORSEMAN IN THE MAKING

Lithograph

ON THE SPRINGBOARD
Lithograph

THE MAN KILLER
Etching

THE TACKLE
Lithograph

AFTER SUNDOWN
Lithograph

THE KNOCKOUT
Lithograph

THE HOME STRETCH
Water Color

THE LAST ROUND

Water Color

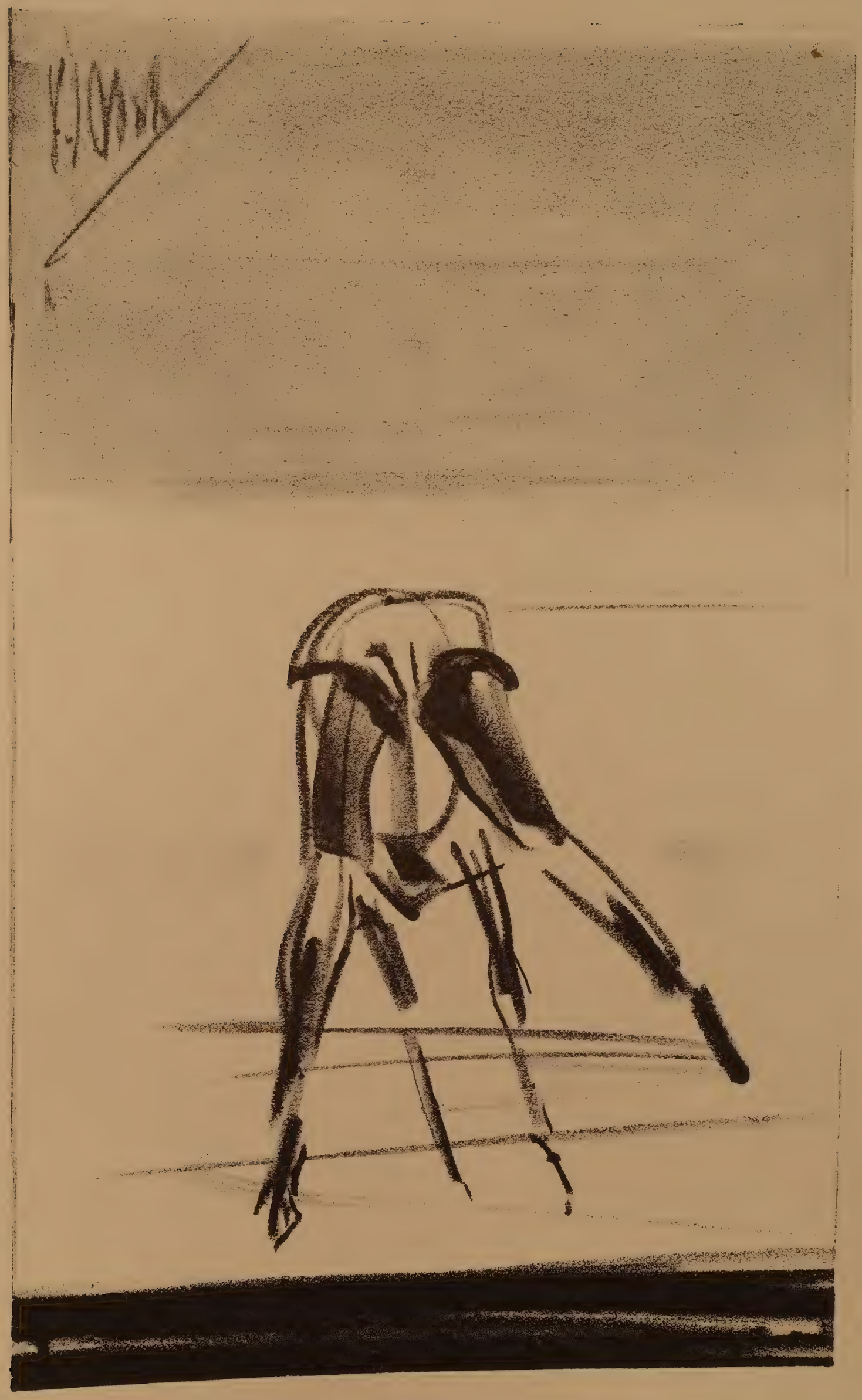
From the collection of Mrs.
Charles Payson

WHIRLING
Lithograph

ROPING THE STEER
Etching

DIVING FOR THE SHARK

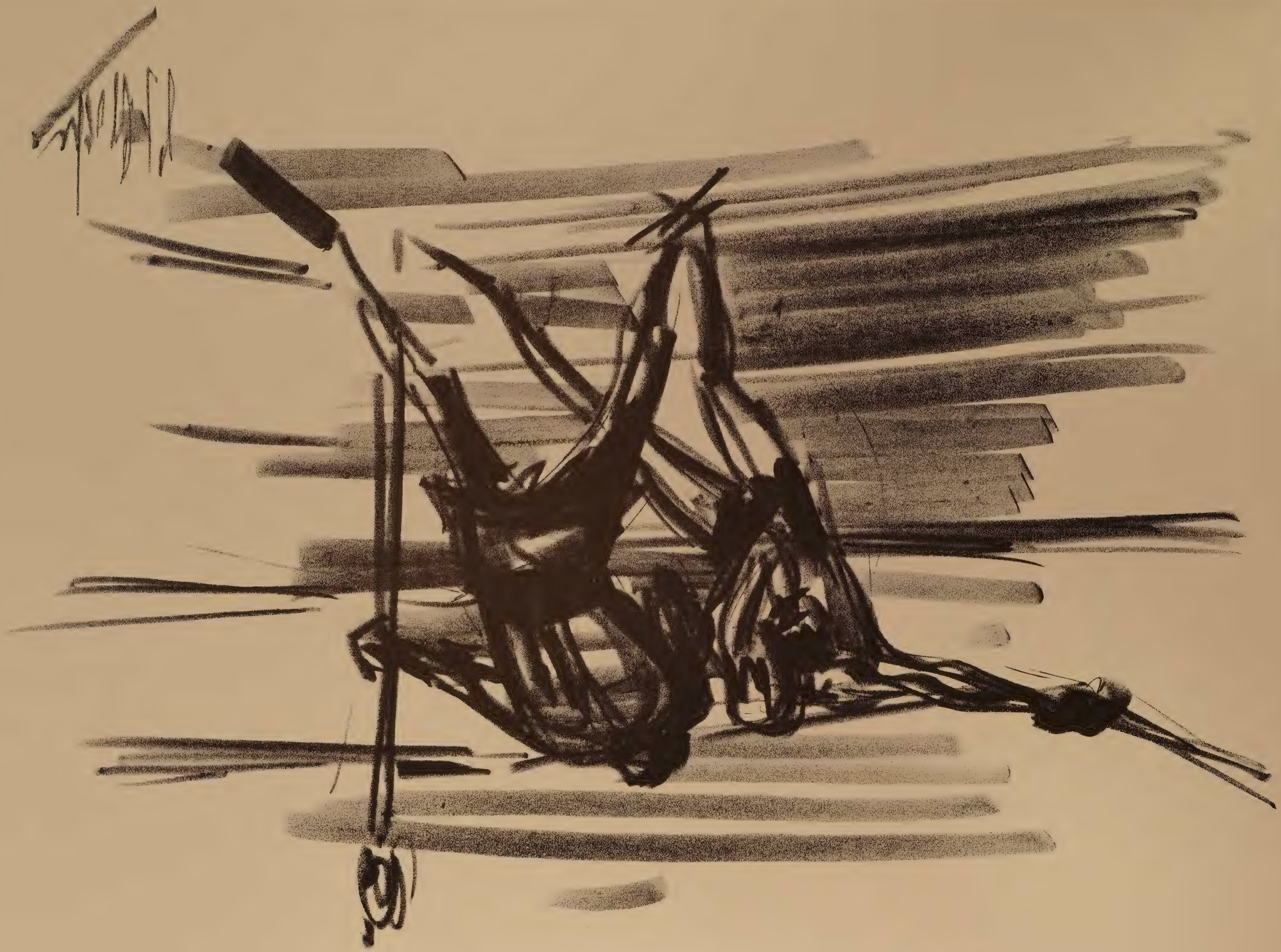
Lithograph



HESITATION
Lithograph

ON THE ROPES

Drawing



ON THE BEACH
Lithograph

LONE COWBOY
Water Color

NIGHT RIDER
Drawing

NIGHT RIDER
Phoenix

IN MIDAIR
Lithograph

GLIDING

Dry Point

BACK DIVE
Lithograph

THE CROSS SHOT
Lithograph

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